

(4) From One in the Country, Concerning Some of the Present

Difficulties.

What I find in the Country, have seen the late Books Printed about Church Discipline, and have had thoughts of *knowing* what it may come to if proceeded in. Be sure below, neither the one nor our Churches will bear any way as is contended for, if stretched to the utmost Latitude. Some have been considering how to accommodate the Principles contended for, and to bring them together again. Among the rest, I have made an Essay, *as for the wild words, and hard Reflections I concern not my self with them. Love and Humility and Self denial exercised will cure them. And when the heat is over, they that are most alive in Grace will prevail them self.*

I find Seventeen Questions Debated, and by either side strained through zeal of Spirit, if I may so call it. My endeavour was to pick up the Truth granted by each, in which I would have all *Moderate Persons* agree; and all see how little disagreement there is, *and finding the great unity of Sentiments.*

The First Question proposed in *Gospel Order Vindicated*, is, *Whether Particular Churches ought to consist of Saints or true Believers in Christ?*

Here we find a full agreement in the Words of the United Brethren in London. *Gospel Order Vindicated* mentions the Article: That none shall be Admitted as Members in order to Communion in all the Special Ordinances of the Gospel, but such persons as are knowing and sound in the Fundamental Doctrines of the Christian Religion, without scandal in their lives, and to a Judgment regulated by the Word of God are persons of visible Godliness and Honesty, credibly professing cordial subjection to Jesus Christ.

This *Gospel Order Received* provides for, and acquiesces in; here is good agreement, let us leave the rest.

The Second Question, *Whether there ought not to be a trial of persons concerning their Qualifications, of fitness for Church Communion, before they are admitted thereunto?*

The Affirmative of this is pleaded for in *Gospel Order Vindicated*, and fully consented to in *Gospel Order Received*. Here there is no difference nor preference for it.

The Third Question, *Whether are not the Brethren and not the Elders of the Church only, to judge concerning the Qualifications and fitness of those who are admitted into their Communion?*

The Reverend Author of *Gospel Order Vindicated* supposes that there may be some difference of Judgment here, and yet without

and also in the Defence of Evangelical Churches, the same Reverend Author subscribes page 40. 31. *We readily grant, That the Elders of the Churches are to be the Rulers of them. And that it is a gross piece of Morillian and Brownistical Arrogancy for the Votes of the Brethren to be valid without their Concurrence, and that the Brethren taking the Word out of their hands is very offensive to the God of Order.* I find in Gospel Order Reviv'd, that they plead not to have the Brethren excluded from all things, but that the Apostle would have every one to keep his proper place and sphere, and do his own Work, the Elders theirs, and the Brethren theirs. And moreover I find that they think it fit to have Members proposed to the Congregation, that they may either consent or object. If each be candidly interpreted, either there is no difference, or the difference is very minute.

Ques. 4. *Whether it is necessary that persons in their Admission into the Church should make a publick Relation of the time and manner of their Conversion?*

This Question in Gospel Order Reviv'd, is answered negatively. And in Gospel Order Reviv'd, the Answer is assented to and highly approved. In after discourses there seems to be some difference, but as far as I can understand, One part stands for that, that it ought not to be imposed, and the other, that it may be practis'd where it is useful and edifying; Both which may be consistent.

Quest. 5. *Has the Church Covenant commonly practis'd in the Churches of New England, any Scripture Foundation?*

The Answer to this Question may at first view seem to contain great difference, it did so to me. But after I had lookt into it, I quickly perceived the Reverend Authors might easily be reconcil'd in this matter. Gospel Order Reviv'd pleads hard for a Church Covenant, but in the explication and pleas for it, I find it reduced to much such a Covenant as Israel was in of old, and sometimes to a publick profession of Faith, and a promise to walk according thereunto. And I find in that fore quoted Book, A Defence of Evangelical Churches, Subscribed by the Reverend Author and his Son. page 40. For our Church Covenant is nothing else but an acknowledgment of our obligations unto those duties which become incumbent on us, as relating unto such or such a Church of His, *No man that knows any thing ever took it for any other.* As much is owned and pleaded for in Gospel Order Reviv'd. Page 11.

Quest. 6. *Is Publick Reading of the Scriptures without any Explication or Exhortation therewith, part of the Work incumbent on a Minister of the Gospel?* Give me leave to joyn to this the Sixteenth Question, in that the same Comment may indifferently serve either.

Quest. 16. *Is it the duty for Christians in their Prayers, to make use of the words of that which is commonly called, The Lord's Prayer?*

In answer to this last, in Gospel Order Reviv'd, is laid the Question is not whether such Readings are lawful, for who doubts that?

And

to make use of those words in prayer. *So men are not
to make use of those words in that, as well as the words of other
prayers in the Scripture may be made use of in our Address to Heaven.*
The Questions being not about their lawfulness or unlawfulness, it
must be about their expediency, when things lawful are expedient.
And if this were the Question, it is like there would be no disagree-
ment, or scarce none that need make any difference in any of our
Churches.

Quest. 7. *Is Baptism to be administered to all Children whom any pro-
fessed Christian shall engage to see Educated in the Christian Religion?*

Gospel Order Vindicated, or the *Rev. Author* of it saith, if the Question
were only whether all Children adopted by Believing Parents might
not be Baptized, we should not oppose. *Gospel Order Reviv'd* saith,
In this we declare our selves satisfied, and crave no more. There is un-
der this head a large discourse upon another Question: *Who are Pro-
fessed Christians?* But I do not see but that one part takes it as nar-
row as the other.

Quest. 8. *Is Baptism in a private house where there is no Church Assen-
bly allowable?*

Gospel Order Reviv'd saith, *We agree with the Reverend Author,*
That Baptism is a part of the Publick Ministry, nor may it be admi-
nistered by one who is not Called to the Publick Ministry; neither
should it usually or ordinarily be administered but in a full Congregation, nor
would we drop a word to discourage so pious a practice. I cannot see that
the Reverend Author of *Gospel Order Vindicated*, can by his Question
and Answer drive at any more than what is yielded.

Quest. 9. *Ought all that contribute towards the Maintenance to have
the privilege of Voting to the Election of a Pastor?*

Here we find some good agreement: *Gospel Order Reviv'd* speak-
ing of the Reverend Author of the other Book, saith, and under his
fourth argument he tells us, that nothing is more evident than that in the
First Ages of the Church, Pastors were Chosen by all and only their Flocks,
which we verily believe. Nor could he have expressed the truth in
more apt words. This seems to be the sense of both; if there should
arise difference about the latitude of the Flock, Churches must exercise
prudence to preserve peace.

Quest. 10. *Is it expedient that Churches should enter into a Consociation
or Agreement that matters of more than ordinary importance, such as Gather-
ing of a New Church, the Ordination, Deposition or Translation of a Pastor
be done with Common consent?*

All the difference in Answer to this as far as I can find is, that the
one pleads, that it is Expedient to enter into a Consociation and A-
greement, and the other, that they are already bound by virtue of their
profession and Christian Covenants: And, what if it be yielded that they
are already bound, and may sometimes have occasion to renew
their bonds?

Quest. 11. *May the Brethren in Churches and not the Pastors only be sent
to the Synods or Yearly in Ecclesiastical Councils?*

the Pastor should be *Principal* or *Principally* concerned. I do not think that Gospel Order Revived doth wholly exclude the Brethren from such Councils, but rather admit them for some ends or use or benefit, though not of equal Voice.

Quest. 12. *Does the Essence of a Ministers Call consist in his being Ordained with the Imposition of hands by other Ministers?*

In Gospel Order Revived, this is joyned with the next, & for brevity sake, I shall follow the same method.

Quest. 13. *May a man be Ordained a Pastor except to a Particular Church, and in the presence of that Church?*

I find the greatest difficulty to show the plain & distinct Agreement in the Answers to these Questions of any, But I shall Essay it. As it is most certain that a Minister may be considered under a double Relation, the One referring to Christ and him whereby he is Christs Minister, and the other referring to the particular Flock to which he is Ordinarily appropriated, and so is theirs; as this double relation is true, so I find it owned of both sides. The Reverend Author of Gospel Order Vindicated, though he speaks mostly of that relation to the Church, yet he doth in some measure own the other here, and in his other writings more fully. So Gospel order Revived though it speaks mostly respecting the Relation betwixt Christ and the Minister, yet they own the other Relation also. Now, let what is spoken one way or other be given to the respective Relations only, and the difference will presently cease.

Quest. 14. *Is the practice of the Churches of New England in granting Letters of Recommendation, or Dismission from one Church to another according to Scripture, and the examples of other Churches?*

I take notice of a passage that the Reverend Author of Gospel Order Vindicated lays down in his Answer hereunto towards the latter end. By the Letters in Controversy nothing else is intended but Letters Testimonial from some Church of Christ, or the Elders thereof concerning some of their Communion Removing from them to another People, be it for lesser or longer time. I find it said in Gospel Order Revived. Indeed there may be a good use of Letters of Recommendation & especially among Strangers: And this I think agrees well with the other.

Quest. 15. *Is not the asserting that a Pastor may Administer the Sacrament to another Church besides his own particular Flock, at the desire of that other Church, a declension from the first Principles of New England, & of the Congregational way?*

The Reverend Author Answers not at all. Gospel Order Revived saith it is no declension from Truth, but agreeable to it. And why not both agree, it is no declension from either.

Quest. 17. *May the Churches under the Presbyterian and Congregational Discipline maintain Communion with one another notwithstanding their differing Sentiments as to Church Government?*

The Reverend Author Answers, They may and ought to do so. Gospel Order Revived highly approves of the Answer, and doctrine of it.

And now it appears there is a very Tolerable and Comfortable Agreement in Principles: And why then should height or heat of Spirit hinder our walking together, and good Agreement? It is desired that all that love ZION, would put in and forward our Peace and Concord, and Fellowship in the Gospel.

IRENEUS ALETHEIAN

